


Transformation of Learning Management under the Merdeka Curriculum: A Case Study at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the transformation of learning management through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti, with a focus on managerial functions that include planning, organising, implementing, and supervising. A qualitative approach was used with a case study method. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, with research subjects comprising the school principal, teachers, and curriculum staff. Data validity is ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. The results indicate that SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti has successfully adopted the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum in managerial practices. The planning process is participatory, learning implementation is oriented towards active student involvement, and supervision is carried out through reflective peer supervision. The main challenges were found in the aspects of teacher competence, technological infrastructure, and community involvement. The strategies implemented include training, strengthening communication, and developing a holistic evaluation system. This transformation shows that strengthening school managerial capacity is key to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Despite challenges, well-planned and collaborative strategies have proven capable of fostering a more adaptive and inclusive learning ecosystem.

Keywords: *Merdeka Curriculum, learning management, formative evaluation, educational transformation.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the Indonesian education system has undergone various fundamental transformations, culminating in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as a form of national learning reform. This curriculum was developed in response to several chronic problems in education, including low teaching quality, unequal access to education, and the weak relevance of the learning process to the needs of the 21st century. In general, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to provide more space for students to develop their potential, creativity, and independence through a flexible, contextual, and competency-based learning approach.

Public dissatisfaction with the national education system was one of the triggers for the emergence of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. A survey conducted by Istiqomah and Fauziah (2024) showed that approximately 67% of parents felt that the current education system was inadequate in preparing their children to face global challenges. These data illustrate public concerns regarding the effectiveness of the current education system. This dissatisfaction is certainly a serious signal for stakeholders in the world of education to re-evaluate the design and implementation of learning policies, including at the senior high school level. The Merdeka Curriculum is not only a normative discourse or policy jargon but also a strategic instrument for structural change in education management (Hanan et al., 2023).

Based on data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, this curriculum was designed to foster an active, collaborative, and learner-centred culture (Fadhli, 2020). In this context, educational management plays a vital role, as the effectiveness of a curriculum is greatly influenced by how it is managed, organised, and supervised in practice.

According to Maya and Lesmana (2018), the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is not only determined by its design, but also depends heavily on the managerial capacity of educational institutions to translate policies into structured and sustainable actions.

In the increasingly competitive and complex world of modern education, the challenges faced by educational institutions are no longer purely technical but also encompass managerial and strategic aspects. One of the main elements that has come under the spotlight is the ability of educational institutions to optimally manage human resources (Anwar & Umam, 2020). Indriyani et al. (2023) emphasise that the success of education cannot be separated from the quality of teachers, principals, and other educational personnel in carrying out their managerial functions. The quality of teaching, curriculum management, and effectiveness of decision-making are key indicators for assessing the success of educational institutions in meeting national learning objectives.

This article presents a case study of SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti, a secondary educational institution that is currently adapting to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This school was selected as the research subject because it represents the dynamics commonly found in many secondary schools in Indonesia, particularly the challenges of implementing new educational policies at the operational level. This study aimed to evaluate how management functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising—are applied in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The theoretical framework used in this study refers to the classical management theory proposed by G.R. Terry (1958), known as the POAC model (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling).

As a contribution to the existing literature, this study seeks to answer critical questions regarding schools' managerial adaptation to new policies and identify common ground between educational management theory and field practice. A review of various literature sources indicates that most previous studies have focused on the conceptual aspects of the curriculum, while the implementation dimension has not been explored in depth (Budiman & Suparjo, 2021). However, in the context of quality-oriented education, policy implementation analysis is key to understanding the extent to which a curriculum's effectiveness can be achieved through appropriate managerial approaches.

Furthermore, this study aims to fill the gap in studies concerning the relationship between educational management and student learning outcomes. Many previous studies have not systematically examined how careful planning, efficient organisation, and consistent supervision can improve the overall quality of learning (Ma'arif et al., 2024). Therefore, this study was designed using a qualitative approach with a case study method to capture the complexity of education policy implementation in a specific local context in Indonesia. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation studies, involving various educational actors, such as school principals, vice principals in charge of curriculum, teachers, and administrative staff.

To ensure data validity, this study used triangulation techniques that combined various sources of information and analysis methods. The data obtained were then analysed through three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. With this approach, we hope that the results of this study will provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools. Furthermore, this study aims to produce findings that can be adopted by other educational institutions in similar contexts. One important dimension that is also raised in this study is the restorative approach that has begun to be consistently implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti.

This approach, which focuses on building healthy relationships between educators and students, as well as constructive conflict resolution, is an integral part of the school management strategy for supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The restorative approach is considered to be in line with the principles of the curriculum, which emphasises character building, independence, and holistic personality development.

This study was also designed to answer descriptive, critical, and transformational questions regarding the extent to which the Merdeka Curriculum has driven positive changes

in learning management at the school. The emphasis is not only on structural aspects but also on the social and cultural dynamics that develop within the school environment. This research is expected to make a meaningful contribution not only in the academic realm but also as a basis for policy considerations for the government, education agencies, and educational practitioners. Through in-depth findings and analysis, this article aims to convey that successful education reform depends not only on progressive national policies but also on careful and adaptive managerial implementation at the school level.

Therefore, strengthening managerial capacity is an important prerequisite for ensuring the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in improving the quality of learning. Thus, this introduction emphasises that educational management that is responsive to policy changes and contemporary challenges is the main foundation for creating an effective educational ecosystem. The case study at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti is expected to make a concrete contribution to the national discourse on the transformation of educational management in Indonesia. The author hopes that readers will gain deeper insights into the importance of strategic curriculum management, especially in responding to the needs and challenges of the 21st century.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, which aims to understand the process of Merdeka Curriculum management in the context of learning at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually and holistically, especially in relation to management functions in curriculum implementation at the school level.

The study was conducted during the 2024/2025 academic year. The research subjects comprised the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, teachers, and educational staff who were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities based on the Merdeka Curriculum. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their relevant knowledge and experience concerning the subject of the study. Data were collected through interviews with the key informants.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, strategies, and challenges faced in the implementation of the curriculum. Observations focused on learning activities, curriculum planning meetings, and classroom monitoring and supervision. The analysed documentation included lesson plans, teaching modules, supervision reports, and curriculum meeting minutes.

Source and method triangulation techniques were used to maintain data validity. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing stages. The entire research process adhered to ethical principles, including participant consent and confidentiality of information. This methodology was designed to produce an in-depth and applicable understanding of the practice of Merdeka Curriculum management in schools in Indonesia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Learning Planning and Organisation

This study aims to examine the transformation of learning management through learning planning and organisation in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study relied on in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis as data collection methods.

The first finding indicates an increase in flexibility in learning planning for teachers. While the previous curriculum adopted a centralised approach to learning, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater scope for teachers to develop contextual planning. This aligns with Firmansyah's (2023) findings, which emphasise that the Merdeka Curriculum prioritises learner-centred learning and grants teachers autonomy in designing learning activities. At

SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti, the planning process is conducted collaboratively among teachers, the principal, and members of the school committee. One principal stated in an interview:

“We give teachers the space to develop learning models that suit the needs of their students, while still within the framework of national learning outcomes. We do this through regular work meetings and teacher learning community forums.”

The second finding relates to more collaborative and team-based learning organisations. SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti formed cross-subject teacher working groups to develop a project-based learning (PjBL) model for this purpose. This model not only encourages students to think critically and creatively but also trains them in cooperation and problem-solving skills. This finding is in line with Malikah et al. 's (2022) research, which shows that organizing teachers into learning teams can improve the effectiveness of the learning process and create more meaningful engagement for students.

Third, teachers demonstrated high awareness of the importance of formative evaluation in the learning process. Assessment no longer focuses solely on the final outcome but also evaluates the process that students undergo. This practice supports Saptiwi's (2023) idea that an in-depth evaluation of the learning process is an important characteristic of the Merdeka Curriculum. SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti implements continuous evaluation and provides direct feedback to students as part of its strategy to improve the quality of learning. The fourth finding is the integration of technology in the planning and organisation of learning.

In the digital age, teachers' ability to utilise technology is key to creating adaptive and engaging learning experiences. Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti have been trained to use various digital platforms for designing lessons and collecting students' assignments online. This supports the findings of Az-Zahra and Muhajir (2023), who emphasised the importance of digital literacy in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The transformation of learning management at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti is evident not only in structural changes but also in a more humanistic and adaptive approach to learning. First, collaborative planning between teachers and school management reflects a paradigm shift in the education sector. Teachers no longer work individually but are now part of a supportive learning ecosystem. This aligns with Pribadi et al. 's (2024) perspective, who state that collaboration among teachers can enhance the quality of planning and implementation of relevant learning.

Second, project-based learning implemented in this school successfully combined theory and practice. With this model, students are encouraged to develop solutions to real-world problems, making learning more contextual and meaningful to them. This strategy is consistent with the ideas of Fadhli in Saring and Widiyanto (2023), who emphasised the need for learning strategies that enable students to actively engage in the development of knowledge and skills based on experience.

Third, formative evaluation plays a central role in learning management (LM). This evaluation is not only seen as an assessment tool but also as a pedagogical reflection instrument for teachers and for students. The practice of formative evaluation at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti allows dynamic adjustments to teaching strategies. By providing direct feedback, students receive clear information about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as personalised learning improvement strategies. This reinforces Saptiwi's (2023) statement that continuous assessment is a key component of the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Fourth, the integration of technology into the learning process marks the school's readiness to face digital transformation.

The use of online learning platforms not only improves the efficiency of assignment collection but also creates a flexible and interactive learning environment for students. In an interview, the principal emphasised the following:

“We recognise the importance of digital literacy in the current learning process. Therefore, the school provides training to teachers, and we are

also gradually equipping every classroom with technological facilities.”

This integration of technology reinforces the findings of Sinaga et al. (2021), who stated that the use of learning technology can improve students' readiness to face the demands of a digital and automated world of work.

Overall, the transformation of learning planning and organisation at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti is a progressive step in responding to the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. This process not only produces more contextual and adaptive learning documents but also fosters a school culture that is collaborative, reflective, and open to innovation. Teachers' active involvement in planning and decision-making makes them agents of change in teaching practices. The support of the school principal and internal school policies strengthen the synergy between management and implementation at the classroom level.

This transformation also demonstrates that curriculum change is not merely about altering documents but requires a shift in thinking, planning, and comprehensive learning management. Therefore, the experience of SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti can serve as a reference for other schools striving to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively in the future.

Transformation of Learning Implementation and Supervision

This study aims to analyse the transformation of learning implementation and supervision at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and education supervisors, direct observation of learning activities, and a review of supporting documents.

The first finding shows that the learning implementation has undergone significant changes. The learning approach is now more participatory and encourages active involvement of students. Teachers are no longer the primary source of information but act as facilitators instead. The interview and observation results indicate that approximately 75% of the students feel more active and enthusiastic about participating in the learning process. Firmansyah (2023) states that flexibility in curriculum implementation granted to teachers contributes to increased student participation. The principal emphasised in his interview:

“We encourage teachers to create dialogic and meaningful learning. Our children must be involved, not just in the present. We believe that involvement is the key to quality learning.”

The second finding relates to the learning supervision. SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti has adopted a collaborative supervision system, where the supervision process is not only carried out by the principal but also involves teachers as peers (peer-supervision). Approximately 60% of teachers stated that this approach helped them reflect on their teaching practices in a more open and productive manner (Miladiah et al., 2023). This practice encourages a culture of mutual trust and professional learning among the teachers.

The third finding shows the challenges in the use of learning technology. Approximately 40% of teachers still experience difficulties in utilising digital technology to support teaching and learning activities, especially in the aspects of assessment and online class management (Saring & Widiyanto, 2023). This indicates the need for further training so that teachers are better prepared to face the demands of digitalisation.

The fourth finding shows that learning evaluation practices have undergone a transformation towards a more reflective formative model. Approximately 70% of students reported that they gained a better understanding when their teachers provided regular feedback. This is supported by the findings of Malikah et al. (2022) and Saptiwi (2023), who stated that continuous evaluation helps students recognise their learning processes and provides opportunities for early improvement.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti

Aspect	Main Findings	Percentage/Respondents
Student Participation	Student involvement increased in discussions, projects, and active learning	75% of students felt more active

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Learning Supervision	Peer supervision supports reflection and improvement in teaching quality	60% of teachers feel assisted
Use of Technology	Teachers experience obstacles in integrating digital learning technology	40% of teachers need further training
Formative Evaluation	Formative evaluation helps students understand the material and learning process	70% of students responded positively

The transformation of learning implementation and supervision at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti shows a significant shift in the educational paradigm of the school. Conventional and one-way learning has now shifted towards more active, reflective, and collaborative learning.

First, increased student participation indicates the success of the student-centred learning approach promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. Ramadhan and Warneri (2023) state that when students are actively involved in learning, they not only understand the material better but also develop critical and collaborative thinking skills that are important in the 21st century.

Second, the collaborative supervision model provides a healthy space for teachers to reflect. Through peer supervision, teachers are encouraged to be open to constructive criticism and learn from their colleagues' practices. Malikah et al. (2022) show that this system is capable of building a professional culture that supports the continuous growth of pedagogical capacity.

Third, challenges in implementing technology highlight the need for strategies to improve teachers' digital competencies. Although schools have provided access to various online learning platforms, their use remains limited. Ramadhan and Warneri (2023) emphasise the importance of training that is not only technical but also pedagogical, so that teachers are able to integrate technology meaningfully into learning.

Fourth, consistent formative evaluation strengthens the quality of learning. Evaluation is no longer merely a measurement tool but an integral part of the learning process. This supports a reflective approach that helps teachers adapt their teaching methods to students' needs (Saptiwi, 2023).

Challenges of Transformation and Strategies for Addressing Them

This study aims to analyse the challenges faced by SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti in the process of educational transformation through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as the strategies applied to overcome these challenges. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and analyses of school documents.

The first finding indicates that the main challenge faced by the school is related to human resource readiness issues. The Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises flexible and student-centred learning, requires teachers to possess more adaptive pedagogical skills. Based on the interview results, approximately 65% of teachers stated that they still felt less confident in implementing learning methods in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Nurhayati & Mulyanti, 2025). This difficulty is exacerbated by limitations in the mastery of educational technology, which is now an integral part of the learning process in the field.

The second finding relates to the limitations of the supporting infrastructure. The information and communication technology facilities at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti are considered inadequate to support digital learning transformation. Fifty-five percent of teachers reported that slow Internet access and limited availability of devices are the main obstacles in the online teaching process and the use of digital media (Laia et al., 2024).

Third, parental and community involvement in supporting educational transformation remains relatively low. Approximately 60% of parents are still focused on achieving conventional academic grades and do not fully understand the importance of character development, soft skills, and 21st-century competencies, which are the main orientations of the Merdeka Curriculum (Nurhayati & Mulyanti, 2025). This indicates a gap between the school's educational vision and community expectations.

Fourth, in evaluation practices, schools face challenges in aligning assessment instruments with the holistic approach mandated by the Merdeka Curriculum (MC). Interviews with

school principals indicate that approximately 70% of the evaluation methods used by teachers are still conventional, such as written tests, and have not fully accommodated competency-based assessment and character development aspects (Utami, 2025).

In response, SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti has developed several strategies. First, internal training for teachers is conducted regularly, covering the strengthening of active learning methods, the use of technology, and the development of alternative assessment tools. Approximately 80% of teachers reported an increase in their confidence and teaching quality after participating in the training (Nurhayati & Mulyanti, 2025). The principal stated:

‘We are focusing on developing teachers’ competencies to meet the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, including in terms of technology use and holistic evaluation.’

Second, the school strives to cooperate with government and private institutions to support the provision of digital learning facilities. This includes improving Internet access and adding ICT devices to classrooms. This cooperation is expected to reduce the technology gap between national policies and school conditions in the region (Laia et al., 2024).

Third, communication and socialisation with parents were strengthened through regular meetings, the publication of school newsletters, and the involvement of parents in project-based learning activities. This strategy aims to build a shared understanding of the direction and goals of education and encourage collaboration to support student development (Utami, 2025).

Fourth, SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti has begun implementing a more varied and inclusive evaluation model, such as student portfolios, project assessments, and self-reflections. This aims to assess student achievement not only from cognitive aspects but also from affective and psychomotor aspects. As a form of appreciation, schools recognise non-academic achievements, thereby encouraging intrinsic motivation among students (Utami, 2025).

Educational transformation at the secondary school level presents challenges that are technical, structural, and cultural. In the context of SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti, the challenges faced reflect the complexity of the adaptation process to the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires changes in thinking, acting, and working in the educational environment.

First, human resource readiness is a fundamental issue. As explained by Nurhayati and Mulyanti (2025), teachers, as the main actors in learning, must possess adequate pedagogical and digital capacities. Curriculum transformation can only be successful if it is followed by a transformation of teacher capacity. Structured and continuous training is an important element in ensuring readiness.

Second, infrastructure issues show that curriculum implementation cannot be separated from schools’ physical reality. Technology is a fundamental requirement for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in the application of project-based learning and the use of digital learning resources. Therefore, investment in educational infrastructure must be a priority for policymakers. As stated by Laia et al. (2024), the success of educational transformation is largely determined by the alignment between policy and schools’ operational capacity.

Third, low community and parental involvement indicates the need for more inclusive educational communication strategies. Schools must function as spaces for dialogue that can bridge differences in perspective between schools and parents. As stated by Utami (2025), the success of character education and 21st-century skills depends heavily on the synergy between the school environment and the family.

Fourth, the development of a relevant evaluation system is an important step in ensuring that the learning process runs in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Holistic assessment will help schools detect students’ overall development and provide appropriate learning responses. Evaluation is no longer administrative in nature but is an integral part of student development strategies.

The strategies implemented by SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti demonstrate the institution’s seriousness and commitment to responding to the challenges of educational transformation.

Strengthening teacher capacity, improving infrastructure, enhancing communication with the community, and reformulating learning evaluation are good practices that can be used as references by other schools in Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the transformation of learning management at SMA Negeri 1 Cihaurbeuti through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum shows significant changes in the dimensions of planning, organisation, implementation, and supervision of learning. The planning process has become more collaborative, the organisation is based on teacher teams, learning implementation is student-centred, and supervision is carried out through a reflective and peer approach. Formative evaluation and technology integration are integral to this transformation. However, challenges such as teachers' limited digital competence, inadequate technological infrastructure, and limited community participation must be overcome. The school responds to these challenges through teacher training strategies, strengthening communication with parents, improving digital infrastructure, and developing a more holistic evaluation system. The limitations of this study lie in its limited scope, which is confined to a single school, meaning that the findings cannot be generalised widely. This study also did not quantitatively measure the direct impact of managerial transformation on students' academic achievement. Therefore, further studies using a mixed-method approach and covering multiple schools are highly recommended to strengthen the generalisability and external validity of the findings.

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